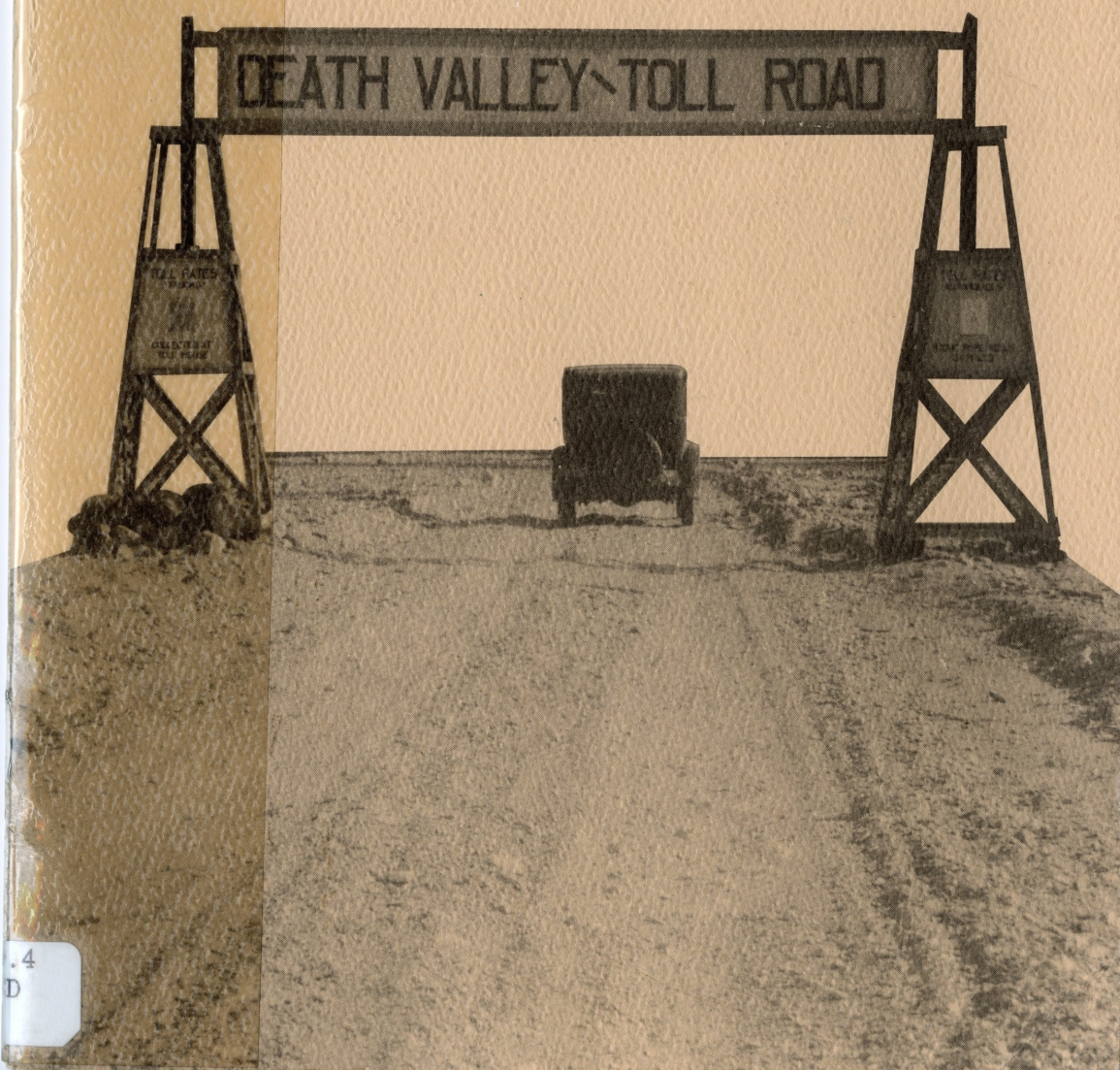
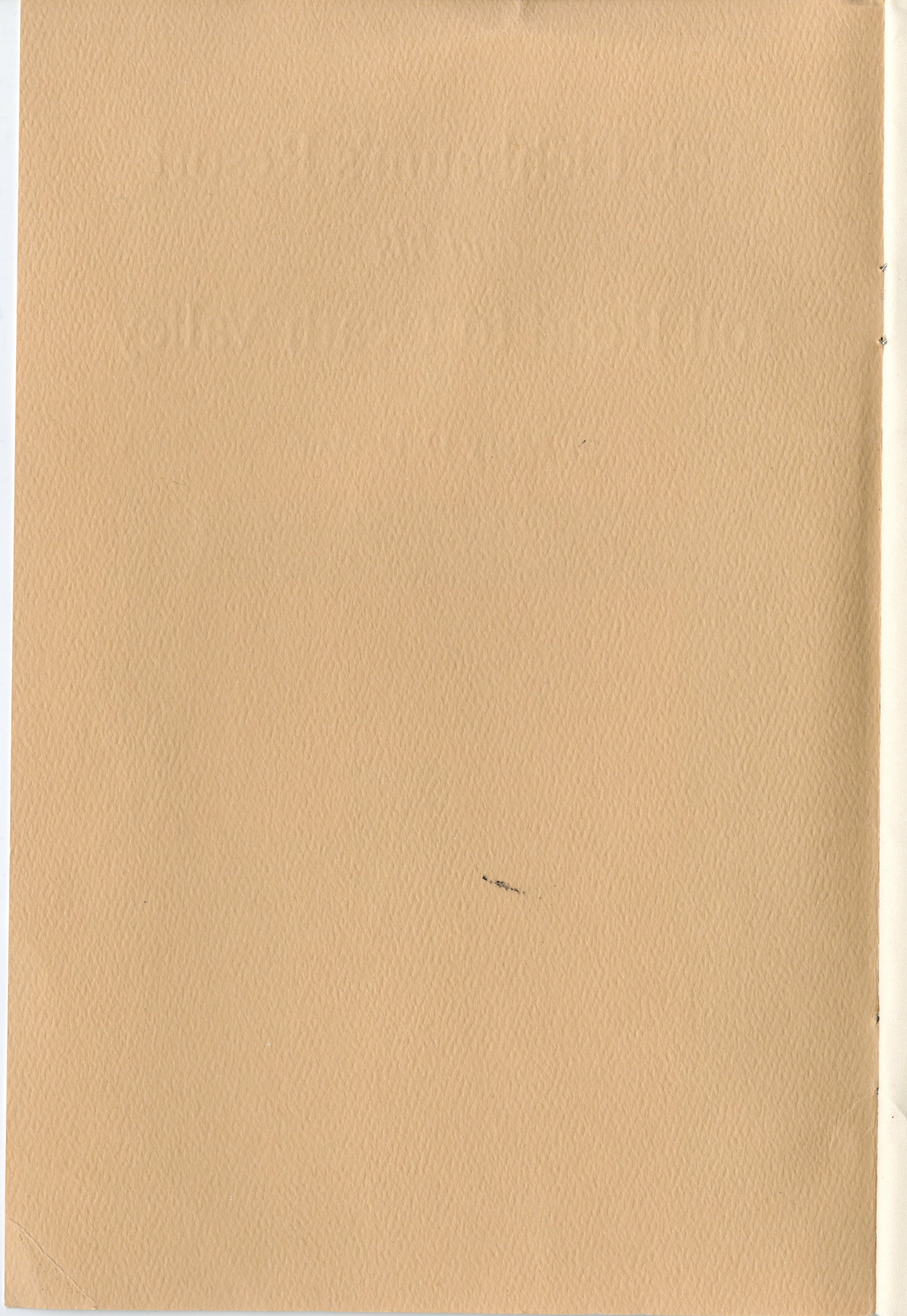


Bob Eichbaum's Resort
and his
Toll Road to Death Valley

by Mary DeDecker



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H. W. Eichbaum

—Robert Palazzo Collection

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by Mary DeDecker



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☛ Most of the contents of this publication first appeared under the title *The Eichbaum Toll Road*, as an imprint of the Death Valley '49ers, Inc.; it was issued in 1970 as that organization's Keepsake No. 10. Out-of-print for many years, it is provided here in a revised and updated format to satisfy popular interest.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Bob Eichbaum's Resort and his Toll Road to Death Valley

to

Joan and Carol

Announcer, announcer, announcer — Mr. W. "Bob" Eichbaum was all of these. He might have been called a dreamer, for when we were children of his time, but he had both the ability and the persistence to turn dreams into reality. His casual acquaintance with Death Valley as a young engineer led him to recognize it as a tourist center. Not only was it suggested by its ideal winter climate and scenery, but he realized that its weathered rocks and desert could be turned into a desirable resort. Tourism would have come to Death Valley eventually, but it took Bob Eichbaum to make it possible in the 1920s.

The difficulties of traveling in this vast wasteland have been recorded so frequently that there is no need to describe them here. The work of the U.S. Geographical Survey, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Wheeler Survey, the U.S. Army, and the U.S. Navy were all in the line of exploration and discovery. The first was marked by the trip in 1873 of the Hayden Survey. The government expeditions were for the purpose of mapping and research, but both groups gave much space to the hardships of travel and the difficulties of travel. Many tales of struggle for survival — of the failure to move — are preserved in the great collections of the Smithsonian Institution. Each life depended on weather, a supply of food, water, and shelter. The hard life of the explorer, then, was not his own as he and his survey shared the risks of uncharted travel.

Anna Winters introduced the tourists when he discovered that

Bob Eichbaum's Resort

and his

Toll Road to Death Valley

ADVENTURER, PROMOTER, MAN OF VISION—H. W. "Bob" Eichbaum was all of these. He might have been called a dreamer, his ideas were so often ahead of his time, but he had both the ability and the persistence to turn dreams into reality. His casual acquaintance with Death Valley as a young engineer led him to visualize it as a tourist center. Not only was he impressed by its ideal winter climate and moved by its scenic beauty, but he realized that its awesome reputation could be turned into a favorable asset. Tourism would have come to Death Valley eventually, but it took Bob Eichbaum to make it possible in the 1920s.

The difficulties of traveling in this vast wasteland have been recorded so frequently that there is no need to describe them here. The trials of the '49ers furnished a dramatic introduction. Then came the Wheeler-Lyle expedition of 1871 and Lt. Birnie's more successful trip in 1875. The first was marked by the tragic loss of two experienced guides. These government expeditions were for the purpose of mapping and research, but both reports gave much space to the hardships encountered and the difficulties of travel. Many tales tell of struggle for survival—or the failure to survive—as prospectors combed the great depression and its mountain borders. Each life depended on reaching a spring or desert waterhole within the limits of endurance. Each man was on his own as he and his burros shared the risks of unmapped travel.

Aaron Winters introduced the borax era when he discovered that

precious substance in 1880. This led to the first industrial ventures in Death Valley. The successful operation of the Harmony Borax works, and soaring demands for the product, created a desperate need for efficient transportation. The famous 20-Mule Team freighters were born of this necessity. The story of those great wagons, the unbelievable endurance of the drivers and swampers, and the well-trained animals pulling their lumbering loads across the dry, lonely miles to Mojave, is one of the most amazing chapters of transportation history. It was a short one, however, ending in 1889 when borax activity moved to Borate, near Calico, for a time.

As nearby mining camps boomed, near the turn of the century, there was a new surge of activity in Death Valley. Bullfrog, Rhyolite, and Beatty were population centers east of the valley, and Skidoo overlooked it from southwest of Tucki Mountain in the Panamints. Indian trails became well traveled thoroughfares between waterholes, and wagon tracks over the best access routes became roads. One important waterhole, located at a junction of Indian trails east of the sand dunes, became a focal point in the route between Rhyolite and Skidoo. It was a barren, sandy place and there were many times when the life sustaining water was difficult to locate. A passing traveler helpfully placed a couple lengths of stovepipe at the hole as a marker, and so it became known as "Stovepipe Wells."

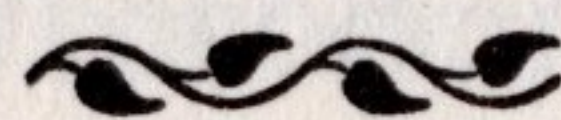
Borax came into the picture again when ores at Borate were exhausted. There were changes in names and organization, but here it was always known as the "Borax Company". It continued to play an important role in Death Valley. When the Lila C. Mine, in the Greenwater Range came into operation in 1907, "Borax" Smith planned to freight the ore out by means of a steam tractor pulling huge wagons. A graded road, much like a railroad right-of-way, was built for this purpose. It ran 98 miles southeasterly from the Lila C. to the community of Ivanpah on the Los Angeles and Salt Lake R.R. (now the Union Pacific). When this strange "train" proved impractical on its first run, the Borax Company faced the fact

that a railroad was essential. The Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad, subsidized by the Pacific Coast Borax Company, was built from the Santa Fé line at Ludlow to Gold Center, later to Beatty, and a seven mile branch was extended from Death Valley Junction to the Lila C. Although the railroad's main purpose was to freight borax ore, the company was ever alert for any other business.

About that same time, Senator Clark of Montana had invested in a Las Vegas and Tonopah Railroad through Rhyolite, and the Bullfrog and Goldfield R.R. came in from the north. Their frantic rivalry was needless—Rhyolite was on the decline before they arrived. Prior to the railroads, stage lines from Las Vegas had furnished passenger service to the eastern borders of Death Valley.

In 1914 borax activity shifted from the Lila C. to mines actually within the Death Valley basin. A narrow-gauge branch was run to the mining camp at (new) Ryan, 20 miles from Death Valley Junction, where it operated until 1928. Furnace Creek Inn was built as a result of this venture. It was hoped by the Pacific Coast Borax Company that the resort would help defray its investment in the costly railroad.

This was the setting for the Eichbaum story.



HERMAN WILLIAM EICHBAUM was born on Christmas Day, 1878, near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He grew up to be an adventurous young man. After earning a degree in engineering at the University of Virginia, he headed west to make his fortune. Bob, as he was known to his friends, was a person who wanted to be where the action was. It was not surprising that he found his way to Rhyolite during its boom days, and it was typical of Bob Eichbaum that he came up with an idea for improving the place. He and young Bill Ball planned and built the first electric plant in Rhyolite in 1906, when the population of that city was said to be 10,000 people.

While in the vicinity of Death Valley, Eichbaum tried the life

of a prospector, using burros to pack into remote canyons. His appreciation of the magnificent scenery and the recreation potential that he saw there may have excited his active mind more than the prospect of gold. This interest in Death Valley was to remain with him for the rest of his life.

By the time Rhyolite died, Bob Eichbaum and Bill Ball were making use of their talents in Southern California at fashionable Catalina Island and the seaside city of Venice. It was at the St. Mark's Hotel in Venice that handsome young Eichbaum was introduced to Helene Neeper, a bay city society girl. They were married October 31, 1914, after a whirlwind courtship.

The newlyweds took up residence on Catalina Island where Eichbaum worked for Mr. Wrigley as an engineer. Here, too, the Eichbaum flair for innovations was evident. His ideas were both popular and profitable. He seemed to have an unusual awareness of the value of transportation in any resort venture. He brought cars down from the Pan-Pacific Int'l. Expo at San Francisco in 1915 to begin a sight-seeing tour business on the island. This idea was so successful that he continued to expand it until 1924, when he sold his transportation system to Wrigley. In the early 1920s he had a goat cart sight-seeing business on the boardwalks of Venice.

But Eichbaum had never broken his ties with Death Valley. He still kept in contact with his old prospector friends and shared with them his dreams of the day when he would have a resort there. He had even selected a site with magnificent views to the north and south, the long length of the valley, and westward across the sand dunes. Those beautiful buttes overlooking the trail junction at Stovepipe Wells from the east would be the ideal location. This dream was never to be fulfilled.

A prerequisite to any resort would be a good access road. He considered all possible routes and weighed the factors involved. Surely the Inyo County Supervisors would share his enthusiasm for developing Death Valley's potential. May 4, 1925 found him appear-

ing before that board in regard to a toll road from Lida (Nev.) into Death Valley by way of Sand Springs. The supervisors were far from receptive.

On June 1 he tried again, this time proposing a route over Towne Pass. The supervisors laughed at the idea, saying they were not spending taxpayers' money for "a road to nowhere".

Undaunted, Eichbaum decided to apply for a franchise to build two toll roads himself. One was to go from Whippoorwill Springs to Darwin Wash, across Panamint Valley, over Towne Pass to Stovepipe Wells east of the sand dunes. The other was to begin at the south end of Death Valley and run northward, by way of Bennett's Well and Furnace Creek Ranch, to Mesquite Spring. This proposal was presented at the supervisors' meeting of August 3, 1925. Eichbaum was supported by G. W. Dow of the Dow Hotel in Lone Pine, R. R. Henderson, editor of the *Mt. Whitney Observer*, and other local citizens. Strong opposition came from the Borax Company people, headed by C. M. Rasor. They were not pleased over the prospect of paying toll on a road in their own territory. The name of H. P. Gower headed a petition against it. The supervisors voted it down, three to two.

The Eichbaum persistence still prevailed. There must be a way! If the borax people did not like his proposal, perhaps he could come up with one they would approve. He was encouraged by the fact that supervisors Hancock and Johnson had supported him. In fact, Mr. Hancock agreed to accompany him to Death Valley to talk to people there. P. W. "Pete" Smith went with them. They were well received and Mr. Rasor of the Borax Company welcomed the opportunity to talk it over. The outcome was an assurance that his company would offer no opposition to a road terminating at Stovepipe Wells. Traveling north, they found Death Valley Scotty involved in the construction of his "castle". He not only approved of a road to Stovepipe Wells, but gladly signed a petition in favor of it.

After the trip to Death Valley, Eichbaum readily adjusted his

road plan to consider only that portion between Whippoorwill Spring (Darwin Wash) and Stovepipe Wells. The other road needed to be improved, but it was not vital to his resort plans. He realized that he would need to show evidence of support, so he encouraged petitions in favor of his new proposal. Lone Pine businessmen became enthusiastic over the idea of bringing tourists from Los Angeles to stop at Lone Pine en route to Death Valley. Darwin anticipated similar benefits. W. G. Scott, president of the Midland Trail, planned to show the Eichbaum Road on their map as a side trip. Support came in from all directions.

Eichbaum was well prepared for his presentation to the Board of Supervisors on October 5, 1925. Attached to his new application was a supporting petition signed by 383 persons, including quite a few from Death Valley. Local men from various towns came to give testimony favoring the road. There were Pete Smith, Wm. Van Buskirk, G. W. Dow, Dr. M. A. Williamson, and F. B. Leete of Lone Pine, Cash C. Clark of Darwin, M. A. Smith of Keeler, and John W. McMurry and A. G. Barmore of Big Pine. Dr. Williamson supported his argument with a letter from the Automobile Club of Southern California relative to the distances across Death Valley. The only opposition at this meeting was expressed by J. O. McIntosh of Big Pine, who "pointed out facts that he considered might cause such a road to be a detriment to the county and a menace to the present highway system". This time the supervisors granted Mr. Eichbaum's application by a unanimous vote. They appointed Cash C. Clark and P. W. "Pete" Smith as commissioners to approve the layout of the road. A third commissioner, G. W. Dow, was appointed by Eichbaum.

As Supervisor Hancock said in later years, they began by surveying the route with a telescope. Thus they studied the landscape to estimate the best way over that precipitous mountain wall. Then a party of five men walked over Towne Pass to determine the specific route. These included Eichbaum and County Surveyor B. E. Sher-

win, whom Eichbaum had hired to do the surveying. Possibly the other three were the commissioners appointed to approve the layout. It was a strenuous trip and Mr. Sherwin carried his instruments all the way. The man who was to follow with two horses never did catch up with them. Tom Hancock, brother of Supervisor Hancock, and a companion drove a Model-T around by way of Wildrose and Emigrant Springs to meet the survey party. When there was no sign of them by dusk, the waiting men felt some concern. Eventually, lights appeared high on the slope. Tom Hancock headed for them with a canteen of water, an act which was much appreciated by the thirsty party. They had started out with only a small canteen between them. Such was the survey over Towne Pass.

The construction job was all hard work. A Mr. Miller, Eichbaum's right-hand-man, was superintendent over a crew of six to eight men, including a driver, a grader, several rock throwers, and a cook. Few of them stayed throughout the job. Billy Finnemore of Darwin was cook for a time, but when his check was made out to his better known name, "Copperstain Bill", he became indignant and quit. The first road cut was made by a 30-Caterpillar tractor pulling a seven-foot road grader. Then it was widened to a passing width. Rocky out-croppings often determined the width of the road as well as its contour. No blasting was done. As one of the crew described it, they "kinda detoured around" the rough canyon of the present route toward the summit. The work progressed in spite of discouraging delays. About every three miles their army tent camp was moved—there was no preferred campspot. Their Christmas camp was just over the summit of Towne Pass. Water for the project was hauled from Darwin Falls. Gas and oil were delivered by Rollin Bell for the Union Oil Company.

By spring they had reached the dunes on the floor of the valley. It was a simple matter to clear the brush here and even to build the road. Before the job was completed, however, they realized that it would be impossible to stabilize the roadbed because of the constant-

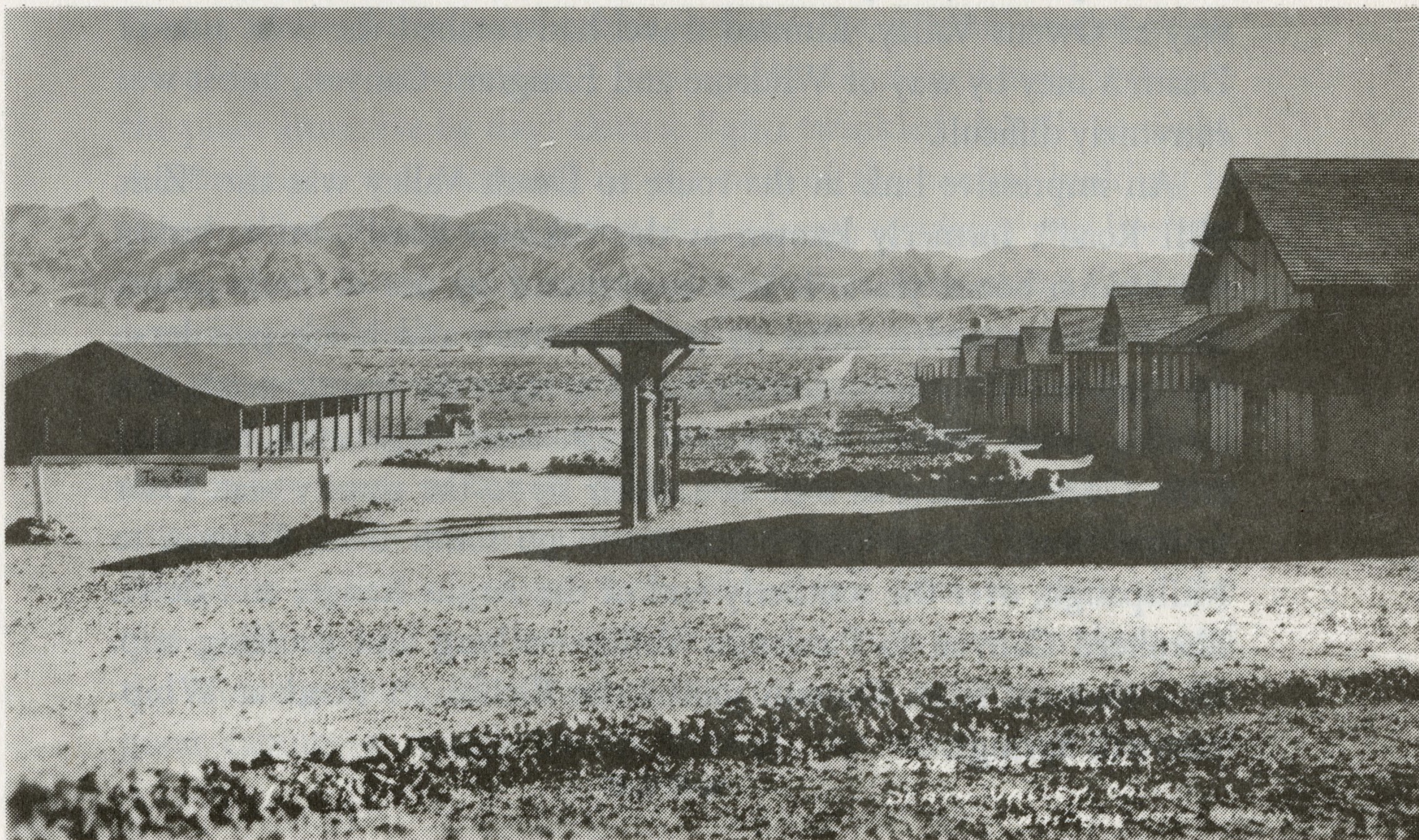


Helene and Bob Eichbaum, 20th Century Death Valley Pioneers

—Robert Palazzo Collection



Western Entrance to the Death Valley Toll Road in Darwin Wash



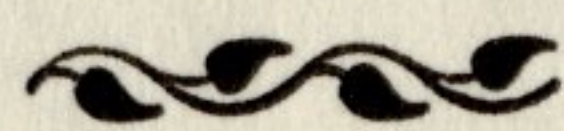
Stovepipe Wells Resort in its infancy, about 1930. Note the Toll Road entrance facade astride the road in distant background.

ly shifting sand. Reluctantly, Eichbaum gave up while still four and one-half miles short of his goal. For all practical purposes, the road ended at the sand dunes.

On May 3, 1926, a "Matter of the Viewing and Laying Out of the Death Valley Toll Road" was signed by the three commissioners and filed in the county courthouse. Attached to the document were certified survey sheets describing a right of way 100 feet wide. A certificate of completion, excepting the easterly four and one-half miles, was filed the next day. At the same time, a schedule of toll rates was fixed by the Board of Supervisors. Automobiles would be \$2.00 each, with an additional 50 cents for each occupant. Rates for trucks, trailers and wagons were listed according to tonnage. Animals were \$1.00 per head. All county officials and their vehicles were to be allowed exemption when on county business.

At last the road was ready for use. One early traveler referred to it as a "dragged out trail", but by Death Valley standards it was a good road. It was the most costly of all entrances into Death Valley. More importantly, it provided a direct route from Los Angeles by way of Owens Valley. Limited travel had reached the west side of Death Valley by way of Wildrose and Emigrant Canyon, but it was extremely difficult.

An impressive link in the route to Death Valley was the "Zinc Hill Road", formerly known as the "Skidoo Road", built during the Skidoo boom years. It was constructed by use of mule power and Fresno scrapers, aided by jack-hammers and black powder—an "impossible" project, accomplished to meet the frantic needs of a mining town. Skidoo had needed fresh fruit, vegetables, and hay from Owens Valley, as well as a closer tie to the county seat. Prior to that time, it had been necessary to go south from Darwin to Millspaugh, over the southerly end of the Argus Range, and down Shepherd Canyon to Panamint Valley—a long and grueling trip. This shortcut from Darwin joined the Eichbaum Road at Whip-poorwill Springs.



TURNING TO PLANS FOR HIS RESORT, Eichbaum drew many of his ideas from the successful operation at Catalina Island. Modified tent houses would be adequate in the mild winter climate of Death Valley. The walls were to be covered with beaverboard below and screened above, with roll-up canvas awnings. There would be electric lights and running water, music and refinements, scenic tours, and first class service.

Building materials were freighted in over the newly built road. Despite Eichbaum's early dream of a place at the buttes and his later plan for building at the original Stovepipe Wells (the water-hole east of the sand dunes) the actual site of his resort was determined by chance. Perhaps he realized by then that one did not push fate too far in Death Valley. At the spot where his solid-tired trucks became stuck in the sand, he unloaded and began construction on the south side of the road. Eventually there were twenty tiny cabins and several larger buildings, supplemented by army tents out in back. A gas pump stood at the edge of the road about where room 66 now stands. The building behind was the office and toll station. (Some of the little guest cabins, behind the present rooms 50-60, were long used for overflow.) Fresh paint and striped awnings made the place attractive by day; electric lights twinkled cheerily at night. A searchlight was mounted on the roof of the central building to throw its beam across the desert. A landscape gardener was brought in to lay out flower beds and to plant Joshua trees along the pathway. Incongruously, a fir tree was placed along the road east of the toll gate before gardening was given up as being hopeless or inappropriate. Later another building was added on the north side of the road to serve as a new lobby, kitchen and dining room (this still stands as the main building, somewhat altered by additions). Wings of additional rooms were added still later to cater to the more sophisticated travelers who liked solid walls between them and the blowing sands. The road at that time ran between it and the guest cabins—a straight swath through the resort into the sand

dunes. Its faint outlines may still be seen from the approach down from Towne Pass.

Newspapers of the day advertised that "Bungalette City" was to be open for business on November 1, 1926. More commonly it was called "Bungalow City". It was only natural, however, that it become known as "Stovepipe Wells Hotel". To avoid confusion, the original waterhole—east of the sand dunes—was known as "Old Stovepipe Wells".

Opening day must have been tame as compared to the first social affair. The Eichbaums invited all the old-timers within a hundred miles to be their guests for a grand Thanksgiving Day party. There was to be turkey and all the trimmings. What an interesting guest list it was! Bill Corcoran and his partner, Jack Stewart, came down from Emigrant Wash; Frank "Shorty" Harris came over from Ballarat with his burros; Ed McSpearin, Bill Ball and Joe Liddick came from Wildrose Canyon; John Cyte hiked over from his cinnabar mine at Chloride Cliffs. The latter had narrowly escaped hanging at Rhyolite some years before, after killing a man who had tried to jump his cinnabar claim. Since that time he was known as "Johnny-behind-the-gun". Lesser known prospectors came from miles around. Each and every one was warmly welcomed. Most of them took baths for the occasion and dressed in their best clothes. It was a great get-together, and the last one for many of them.

Stovepipe developed into a favorite rendezvous for the old-timers, and the Eichbaums valued these friendships. Bill Ball came occasionally to visit his old friend, Bob. They enjoyed getting together so much that they sometimes talked through the night. Death Valley Scotty always stopped over on his trips to Los Angeles. Helene Eichbaum was always "Princess" to him. Among other privileges he enjoyed there, he liked to stride into the kitchen and give his orders directly to the cook. Bill Corcoran, who first struck it rich at Rhyolite, was a frequent visitor.

Such associations gave Eichbaum a mining urge that he could not resist. He and Bill Corcoran made a valiant attempt to bring the mines of Skidoo back into production. Three of the Stovepipe tourist cabins were moved up to the old camp to serve as headquarters while exploratory work was being done. The old Skidoo pipeline had been removed years before, and they found it impractical to continue operations without a water supply.

One memorable experience was when Eichbaum and Scotty decided to jump one of Pete Aguerberry's claims up Scotty's way. Their doubtful justification was that Pete had not kept up his assessment work. Eichbaum was rebuilding the claim's corners while Scotty prepared a tin can for the location notice when, suddenly, they found themselves looking into the end of a double-barreled shotgun. Pete's words, "Now you bums get the hell out of here before I blow you out!", were not needed to start them on their way. As Scotty said later, "I was leavin' that part of the country anyway."

It took time and patience to convince people that Death Valley was an ideal place for a tour. Eichbaum's main selling point was the balmy winter weather. He advertised all accommodations of a high class resort, including baths and running water. Motor stages brought visitors from Los Angeles by way of Mojave, Little Lake, Lone Pine and Darwin. It was an exhausting trip from the stop at the Dow Hotel in Lone Pine to Stovepipe Wells. The ride down the Zinc Hill road from Darwin was a thrilling one—not always appreciated—and the final pull over Towne Pass was enough to make the traveler happy for any accommodations. Hardy souls who drove their own cars were duly impressed. When T. R. Goodwin, later to become the first superintendent of Death Valley National Monument, made a trip to Death Valley in 1927, it took some careful negotiating back and forth to get his Oakland motor car around some of the curves. The Eichbaums did their best to show visitors an enjoyable time. They advertised: "Pack animals are available with famous old-time prospectors as guides. Thrills of the long ago, minus the

dangers and discomforts." Most guests, however, preferred to do their sightseeing in the resort's large Buick sedans.

There must have been times when Eichbaum wondered whether his resort was worth the effort. Securing supplies was an eternal problem in that isolated location. The simplest needs involved great distances and long delays. Most supplies were purchased in Lone Pine. The laundry was done in Beatty. Wells sunk on the property produced a salty water unfit to drink, so all the water for cooking and drinking purposes had to be hauled from Emigrant Springs. It was difficult to keep employees in a place so remote. The usual staff included a clerk, a bellhop, a cook, two waitresses and two guides. Employees took care of the toll gate and gas station as well as driving guests on tours to points of interest. There were also about five maintenance men who kept up the roads. Besides maintaining the toll road, Eichbaum cooperated in keeping the road open from Scotty's Castle and other approaches to his resort.

The first pilgrimage of any size came for Easter sunrise service on March 26, 1927. This was arranged by the Eichbaums, who were well prepared for the occasion. Services were conducted before a large cross set up on the brow of a dune. Benjamin F. Bledsoe, a federal judge, was invited to give the address. He rose to the occasion eloquently. Newspapers delighted in printing dramatic accounts of the scene, where the sun came up over the Funeral Mountains to the strains of "Onward Christian Soldiers". Many cars made the trip from Los Angeles, in addition to special motor tours. One woman in a party of 29 people wrote an interesting account of her impressions. She said the toll on their seven cars and passengers amounted to over \$60.00. Excerpts from her letter follow:

"Electric lights at the resort and a searchlight at night throwing its beam over the valley. Place is nice, fine baths, toilets and an army of colored help all dressed in white duck . . . Charge \$17.50 per day per couple, three meals and room. Have radio and phonograph . . . all had dinner at the hotel . . . later much laughing and singing songs and general good time. Some played they were '49ers and put the seven cars in a circle with campfire in center—got to bed at midnight."

The success of the sunrise service gave a great boost to tourism in Death Valley. Seeing Death Valley became the thing to do, especially on holidays. On Washington's Birthday, 1930, so many returning cars stopped at the Outpost cafe in Darwin that more than a case of eggs was served—as was all the canned food. Tourists were coming from everywhere in ever increasing numbers. They enjoyed going and returning by different routes, so other roads were being improved. The old "County Road" over Emigrant Canyon was getting more travel. It angled from the canyon across the alluvial fan northeasterly and crossed the Eichbaum road west of the resort. From there it nearly paralleled it for a distance before angling southeastward through the Devil's Cornfield and on to Furnace Creek. Some traveled it to avoid paying toll.



WITHOUT WARNING, TRAGEDY STRUCK at Stovepipe Wells Hotel. Bob Eichbaum was stricken with meningitis. Dr. Frank Ainsley, a friend who was a guest at that time, helped prepare a bed in one of the seven-passenger sedans to transport Eichbaum to Los Angeles. Five days later, on February 16, 1932, the colorful life of H. W. Eichbaum came to an end.

Running the resort and keeping up the toll road was a heavy responsibility for a woman who never before had assumed such a role, but Helene Eichbaum measured up to the task. There was little time to be frightened or lonely. Besides carrying on the business, she fed and doctored old-timers in need and helped provide for the local Indians. She could scarcely be blamed if she came to the point of telling weary, hungry and complaining travelers that she was a dancer, not a cook.

Only a year after the death of her husband, Helene Eichbaum saw Death Valley become a national monument. One wonders if she realized how much they had contributed to the recognition of Death Valley's potential.

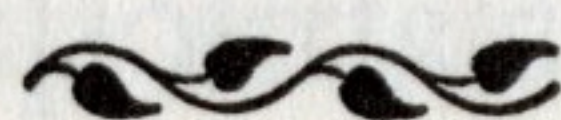
The decree of distribution of Eichbaum's estate revealed an interesting ownership which seems a clue to dreams that were still unfulfilled. He held title to 80 acres of land on a point overlooking his favorite buttes, between them and Hole-in-the-Rock Spring. The decree also included 135,833 shares in the Emigrant Milling and Mining Co., with its principal place of business at Stovepipe Wells Hotel.

Later owners of the resort discovered, unhappily, that they did not have title to the land they occupied. The acreage sold to them as the resort site was nearly a mile northwest in the next section. With the help of T. R. Goodwin, superintendent of the new Death Valley National Monument, an exchange was arranged to correct the situation. It was approved by an act of Congress.

The toll road had served its purpose. Not only had it provided a direct route out on the west side, but it had opened the way for travel across Death Valley. There had been little freighting over it but a great amount of tourist travel. Eichbaum had not intended or expected to make money on the road. When he was present at the toll gate he never charged local people, but his employees showed no favoritism. Miners, who had to travel the road frequently, resented having to pay toll. This feeling gradually spread as activity in the region increased, until a group of citizens petitioned the Board of Supervisors to purchase the Eichbaum road and discontinue the toll. Communities which had appreciated the road in the beginning now complained that the toll charge was discouraging travel. It was considered inappropriate to have a toll road as access to a national monument.

The California Division of Highways had been considering the road as a part of Highway 190. Portions of it were very narrow and grades were not of acceptable standards, but no satisfactory alternate route had been found. This spoke well of Eichbaum's foresight in selecting the route. Negotiations with Mrs. Eichbaum resulted in a sale on December 19, 1934. The price was \$25,000; \$24,900 for the

toll road and franchise and \$100 for the 100 foot easement over the resort property. The state highway route over Towne Pass was not changed except for a section toward the summit on the west side. At the resort, the highway now curves northward around the main building and then takes a route south of the sand dunes. Darwin and the thrilling Zinc Hill road were by-passed in 1937 by the scenic "Darwin cut-off".



THE EICHBAUM TOLL ROAD has served its time. Its place in history is surprisingly large for a road so short in distance—less than 40 miles. Bob Eichbaum's vision and persistence had changed Death Valley's image from one of horror to a place of pleasure. Helene Eichbaum bravely carried on after her husband's death. The creation of Death Valley National Monument in 1933 benefited from Eichbaum's role as a pioneer and made a significant change in the outcome of his dreams.

Helene married Hal G. West in 1934. Two years later they sold Stovepipe Wells to the General Hotel Company and left the valley. After changing hands several times Stovepipe Wells Resort was acquired in 1947 by Major George Palmer Putnam and his wife, Peg. They had been living at Whitney Portal west of Lone Pine at a wintry height of approximately 8500 feet, so Stovepipe Wells and its sea-level elevation and warmer climate proved to be a pleasing relocation. R.R. Henderson, a prominent Lone Pine businessman (and his wife Hazel) gave financial support to the transaction. Unfortunately, in just three years another sad incident occurred at Stovepipe Wells—the death of George Putnam, in January 1950. As with Helene Eichbaum 18 years earlier, that left Peg to assume the heavy responsibility of operating that remote resort. Realizing that she needed help, Earl Driskill—manager of Scotty's Castle—(and his wife, Chris) was persuaded to come to Stovepipe. Earl was a most capable person who had the ability to conduct operations at

the resort through those difficult years. Not only did he manage it capably but he came to the rescue in its financial crises. He built additional guest rooms, including the '49er wing. Chris was his dependable helper in the daily operations. Earl made annual summer trips to New Mexico and Arizona to shop for Navajo blankets and Indian jewelry. This enabled Stovepipe to open in the fall well stocked with the finest of blankets and authentic Indian jewelry. Peg provided a colorful desert atmosphere with her attractive interior decorating. She became famous as "Mrs. Stovepipe Wells", the hostess of that increasingly popular desert resort.

Fifteen years after Putnam's death, Peg married Willard Lewis in 1965, which brought another significant change at Stovepipe. The newlyweds decided to sell the resort and move to Los Angeles. This provided Ellie and Trevor Povah of Hamilton Stores in Yellowstone National Park an opportunity for a "year-round" operation for their business. With purchase of Stovepipe Wells they could provide winter employment in Death Valley during the months when Yellowstone had to shut down, thus, in 1966 they acquired the Stovepipe Wells Resort under the corporate name of Trevell, Inc. One condition of the purchase was to require a form of title insurance which guaranteed that the parcel purchased was indeed the land occupied by the resort. The fact that a telephone line was installed to Stovepipe that year was a major step in overcoming its isolation.

In 1967 Earl and Chris Driskill retired and moved to Las Vegas. Their devotion to the Stovepipe Wells resort was no longer needed.

As the Povahs said, they loved Stovepipe Wells and put their hearts and souls into the operation. Their enthusiasm was contagious and the resort prospered as Stovepipe Wells Village. Although that was its formal name it was always known simply as "Stovepipe" by those who frequented it. An unexpected disaster, however, nearly put them out of business. A series of small fires were discovered and extinguished before it was realized that the teenage son of the

maintenance man was a pyromaniac. When a fire in the dining room was discovered it was too late to save the structure. The guests hurriedly removed their belongings from the guest rooms and joined in the effort to control the blaze. A bucket brigade carrying water from the swimming pool managed to save the nearby and adjoining buildings. The dining room-bar was a total loss. The Povahs then designed and built a beautiful new facility to house a kitchen, dining rooms and a tavern. The rustic Western bar itself, came from Anaconda, Montana. The hall between the tavern and the dining area was designed by Ellie to have the atmosphere of a drift in an underground mine. Its timbers, acquired from the U.S. Borax Company, had been used in a borax mine, and on the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad. The entire building reflected the Povah's ingenuity along with good planning for better serving the public.

A major part of Stovepipe's history has been the difficulty of acquiring adequate water. The flow of Emigrant Spring, the original water source, was not enough to meet the resort's growing needs. Besides, the potable water from that source had to be hauled daily by truck down the steep Emigrant Canyon road. It was a major operation not without its hazards. Any wells at or near the resort produced saline water unfit for drinking. It was a great day in 1975 when good drinking water became available from a reverse osmosis plant owned and operated by the National Park Service. Two water systems served Stovepipe. The one carrying potable water did not reach every guest room, but pitchers were furnished to be filled at outside faucets. The other line carried the non-potable water to be used for washing and bathroom needs, as well as the swimming pool. The reverse osmosis plant softened and filtered the well water, putting out 12 gallons per minute of drinking water and 35 gallons per minute of more saline water for the other uses mentioned. The resort happily retired its water truck.

Stovepipe seemed to reach its peak following completion of the new dining facility. The Roadrunner rooms, along with other

additions, were built to meet the needs of its growing business. Improvements were also made in housing and services for employees. The National Park Service frowned on additional building, however. Feeling hampered and discouraged, the Povahs decided to give up and sell out. It was a difficult decision, but in January, 1979, they deeded the property to the United States of America, to be operated by the National Park Service. Since that time the resort has continued to operate as Stovepipe Wells Village, managed by various lessees, mostly that of Amfac Hotels and Resorts, Inc.

When the California "desert bill" passed in 1994 it transformed Death Valley from a National Monument to that of a National Park, increasing its dimensions by 1.3 million acres. Although the western boundary of the new Park changed to some 40 miles west of Stovepipe, accessibility to the resort is still reached via Calif. Hwy. 190, the same route Eichbaum pioneered over Towne Pass back in 1925-26.

If Bob Eichbaum were here today, he would like what he saw. His dream has developed into a major resort, accessible by a paved state highway. It is a favorite place for desert lovers to enjoy the comforts of a modern facility while communing with the desert. The loss of the Povah's enthusiasm was regrettable but new lessees carry on providing first class service.



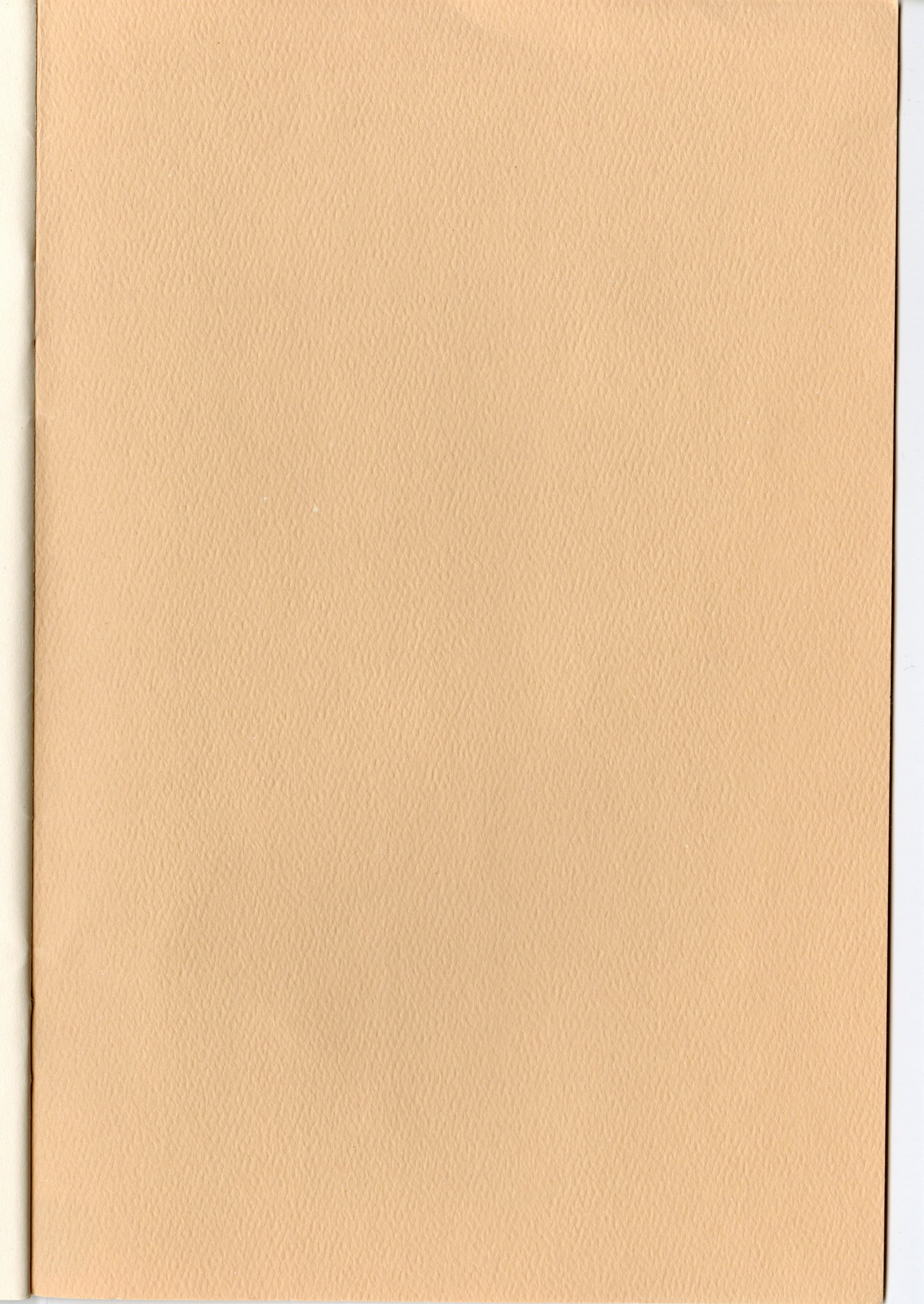
APPRECIATION

These glimpses into history could not have been accomplished without the help of many cooperative people. Their contribution varied from minute bits of memory to substantial parts of the story. It is difficult to list them all without overlooking even one whom I would not want to miss. I am equally grateful to each unnamed person who shared in bringing the Bob Eichbaum story to life as well as to those who helped to perpetuate his dream. —M.D.



Since 1935 author Mary DeDecker—with her husband, Paul—have lived in Independence (Inyo County) California, not far from Death Valley itself. They raised two daughters in the Owens Valley community and have remained to spend their retirement in the desert-mountain country that they love. Mary's major focus has been on the native plants of eastern California. She has discovered new species and even a new plant genus, a desert shrub which was named for her, *Dedeckera eurekaensis*. A canyon at the discovery site in the Last Chance Mountains is named for the plant. Mary's second love is local history, especially that concerned with the desert. Her contributions to publications in both fields have been extensive.





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